2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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From the account of the origin of the cult it will be seen that the prophet believed himself possessed by the spirit of the actual taro plant. When once the cult was set moving many others besides Buninia began to receive visitations, and informants who lived in his neighbourhood, i.e. near the Mambare mouth, expressly stated that the visitations were from spirits (*atiti*) of the taro (*ba*). This they realized most commonly by means of their dreams. There were spirits of all the multifarious kinds of the taro plant, *Kaiva*, *Porove*, *Kivere*, *Ovivi*, &c., and not only of the taro but of other garden plants as well. It is too much to expect cut-and-dried dogma from natives, and there is confusion and haziness as to the nature and numbers of these plant spirits. There are probably at least a score of varieties of the taro cultivated by the Orokaiva, all of them readily distinguished by differences of leaf, stalk, or bulb. The taro spirits bear the names of these several varieties, but, according to the truly orthodox view propounded in the head-quarters of the cult, there are countless spirits for every variety. They join in disembodied forgatherings at the *Ba nyasi*, or Taro villages, Siri, Waiegi, Kome, and Duero—to name some of them—which are wooded hills along the picturesque coast between Deboi and Ambasi. They throng invisibly at the feasts in the real villages. As I was once talking with the Taro man Yaviripa (a rare opportunist in debate) he informed me that a taro spirit was close by us at the moment. He had met the spirit in a dream last night, and had been apprised of its intention to join the discussion; now a twitching in his shoulder told him that the appointment had been kept.

Except in dreams the taro spirits are invisible. It is noteworthy that in the dreams they always appear in human form. In the visions of Buninia, for instance, the dancers were taro spirits in the guise of young men. Some informants have actually used the expression *Ba embo*, or 'Taro man' (usually signifying the Taro specialist), for the taro spirit. A list was given of the

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various plant spirits and the forms in which they appeared. Taro (*ba*), banana (*bido*), sugar-cane (*dou*) were men; so also were the ornamental *Handoro* and *Laravi* (the latter being younger brother to the former); the betel-palm (*da*) appeared as a man carrying a lime-pot), the coco-nut (*mutari*) is a woman; various other ornamental or scented plants as young boys.[1] Such a list is too definite and detailed to represent a belief of wide acceptance; various seers see the spirits in various forms, drawing on their own imagination. In questioning the immediate followers of Buninia I heard no mention of a spirit of the dead, i.e. so long as the discussion confined itself to the Taro cult. On the other hand, though making constant reference to the movement in other localities, I heard practically no mention of spirits of the taro until I reached what was really the home or fountain-head of the cult. The one or two isolated allusions which formed the exceptions were made moreover with a conspicuous lack of confidence.

Now the time-honoured religious system of the Orokaiva seems to have its basis on a strong regard for the dead, a complex of affection, respect, and fear. There is a belief in the life after death, though it is not wholly pleasant or comforting to the believer. In fact he thinks little of his own life after his own death, but far more of the after-life of his relatives, who may do so much to prosper or to persecute those who survive them. The dead will haunt the neighbourhood of their homes in a variety of forms, mostly very terrible or horrifying, as those who have seen them will testify, and are known among the different tribes by a variety of names—*binei*, *sovai*, *embaki*, *siango*, &c. There is of course no perfect consistency in native belief on such a matter, though one general doctrine seems common to all the Orokaiva: this is the doctrine of animal reincarnation. After death a man's spirit reappears in the form of some creature—pig, snake,

[1] Certain of the ornamental plants grown in the gardens were pictured as girls. *Tamomi*, e.g., was the 'Sweetheart of the taro'.

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second category, viz. those caused by the spirits, that the Taro doctor is best qualified to deal. That the spirits of the dead may afflict their surviving friends with illness is an old Orokaiva doctrine; that the spirits of the taro can do the same is presumably a new doctrine, associated only with the new cult.

The native goes in real fear of his dead relatives and in perpetual anxiety lest he should offend them and incur their displeasure. This is probably the reason why a dead man's garden is taboo to his relatives: they fear he may infect the products of it out of sheer malice. If a man ate a banana which a *binei* had touched he would fall ill; so also if he ate one of the *binei* animals, i.e. one on which the dead was reincarnated; or, indeed, if he merely neglected the offerings and the observances which are due to the dead.

In the doctrines of the new cult it was maintained that a man might give offence to the actual taro spirit, and be punished by it with a sickness. Thus there were certain varieties of taro, perfectly wholesome, which were made taboo to the layman of the new cult. They were called *koropa*, or strong, and he ate them at the risk of illness. So again, according to Buninia and Yaviripa, taro might not be pulled without first consulting the Taro men. The taro spirits would be angry with one who was so disrespectful as to break this rule, and would enter into him and lay him up with a sickness.

It is not fair to pester a native for definite explanations of abstrusities. The dead or the taro may *influence* for evil the rash or irreverent, and this influence is felt to be a kind of spiritual possession. Just as the taro spirit may, in the accredited Taro man, be a fund of power, so in the layman who has rashly or ignorantly offended, it may be a source of sickness. We can only say that the native's conception of spiritual possession is not less hazy than our own.

The methods of the doctor are in the main directed towards freeing the patient from the evil influence. The

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FIVE NEW RELIGIOUS CULTS IN BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

E. W. P. CHINNERY, F.R.A.I., AND
A. C. HADDON, Sc.D., F.R.S.

I.

E. W. P. CHINNERY.

668 I HAVE recently been engaged in observing the origin of two religous cults known as "Kava-Keva" and "Kekesi." They are animistic practices that, notwithstanding their prohibition, have already become powerful, and extend from the Gira River (8° S. lat.) to Buna Bay.[1]

769 774 The belief in ghosts and spirits is a predominant characteristic of the northern native. In almost every tribe I have observed the propitiation of family ghosts with individual offerings of food by ordinary persons to secure the vitality of their food supply, and by sorcerers to stimulate [787] their charms. Ghosts are invoked during ceremonies by divination to reveal crimes and criminals. Food offerings to ghosts are made during death feasts and during certain initiation rites. The house of initiation and the paraphernalia of [778] the dance are believed to have spiritual powers, and when the paraphernalia are thrown into the river at the completion of the rites, they are invoked to smite the enemies of the dancers.

776 664 178 Yet, although the spirits and ghosts are legion, I had nowhere come across any conception of a supreme spirit until the outbreak of the Kava-Keva[2] movement, when the villages

[131] [1] It may be well to note that the Gira River opens at about 8° S. lat. on the north coast of British New Guinea, and that the mouth of the Mamba River is four miles to the south, both being in the Mambare Division. Buna is on the south of Holnicote (Gona) Bay, about 8° 37′ S. lat., and is in the Kumusi Division. Kororo, Mount Victory, is an active volcano, nearly 5000 feet in height, a little to the west of Cape Nelson, which is about 9° S. lat.

[158] [2] "Kava-Keva" is a Motuan word which is used extensively throughout the tribes of British New Guinea by adoption to express a condition of madness or irresponsibility either temporary or permanent.

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concerned discarded individual practices in favour of co-operation; or, more strictly, changed from the worship of individual ghosts to the worship of the "Food-Spirit." The Kava-Keva is, I understand, positively a new idea, and not an attempt to revive old customs. Whilst observing the Kava-Keva rites on the second occasion I invited Mr Copland King, a clergyman of the Anglican Mission, to attend with me, and he has since written a paper on the subject. Mr King and I are the only Europeans who witnessed the beginning of the Kava-Keva rites, and I alone witnessed the beginning of the Kekesi rites. The following account of the two cults is based upon information supplied to me by Boninia and Bia at the inception.

1. THE "KAVA-KEVA" RITES.—Boninia is an elderly native of Taututu, one of the villages of the Dowai-ia division of the Binandere tribe, on the lower Mamba River. He was a man of no reputation as a magician or prophet. Early, however, in 1914 he visited the other villages of his group—Gauoro (on the coast), Duvira, and Tsiu (up the river)—and announced that he had been "struck down" in his garden by the "Spirit of Taro" (the staple diet). He had been told, he said, to warn the people that their dilatory methods of cultivation had given displeasure, and that unless they observed a ritual which had been taught to him, the "Food-Spirit" would destroy their gardens and force them to live on sago. Boninia's message was received without enthusiasm, and the ritual was declined. Nothing more came of the incident until the following November, when a young girl named Dasiga, of the village of Gauoro, developed a condition of mental abnormality. For a day or two she was quite oblivious of her surroundings, and chanted mechanically a new song, which was identified as part of the ritual disclosed by the man Boninia. In response to the request of the people Boninia examined the girl, and, in conformity with his advice, she was taken into the gardens, and there, amongst the taro leaves, as he had foretold, the "Spirit left her," and she recovered her normal state. Two or three days later she returned to her village. Then, almost immediately, she relapsed into her Kava-Keva condition, and simultaneously one other Gauoro girl and four young men "were visited by the Spirit." A second messenger to Boninia found that the "sickness" had appeared in each of the villages of the group, and that several natives were "possessed" and under treatment by Boninia. The headmen of the group were considerably alarmed, and called a meeting in Gauoro. Here those who had been "visited" disclosed the communica-

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II.

A. C. Haddon.

The following article was written a year before receiving Mr Chinnery's communication. I think it advisable to let both papers appear together, as they throw light upon each other.

The natives of the Kumusi, and more especially of the Mambare Divisions, must be in an excited condition, for the new cults noted by Mr Chinnery do not seem to be related with the somewhat earlier cult to which I call attention, nor is there any evidence of the slightest connection between these and the abortive message of the Milne Bay "prophet." It is interesting to observe that M. Moszkowski[1] records a Messiah belief among the coast tribes of the Mamberamo, a river that opens by Cape D'Urville, in Netherlands New Guinea, at the eastern limit of Geelvink Bay. He says that there is everywhere met with amongst the coastal tribes a belief in Manseren Korēri, an ancient culture hero, and that the belief is certainly older than the first appearance of the missionaries. Very long ago there lived, according to this belief, a man endowed with supernatural and divine powers. He gave the Papuans laws and regulations, and founded the men's ceremonial houses. But, because the Papuans gradually neglected his commands, one day he vanished. Yet, so the legend runs, he will eventually return, and then everything will be renewed. Therefore is he called Manseren Korēri, the god at whose return everything will cast its skin.

An awakening of religious activity is a frequent characteristic of periods of social unrest. The weakening or disruption of the older social order may stimulate new and often bizarre ideals, and these may give rise to religious movements that strive to sanction social or political aspirations. Communities that feel themselves oppressed anticipate the emergence of a hero who will restore their prosperity and prestige. And when the people are imbued with religious fervour the expected hero will be regarded as a Messiah. Phenomena of this kind are well known in history, and are not unknown at the present day among peoples in all stages of civilisation.[2]

It is significant that even among the savages of New

[1] *Zeitsch. f. Ethnol.*, xliii., 1911, p. 387.

[2] The Ghost Dances of the Indians of the Plains of N. America, which partake of a Messianic character, may serve as an example.

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Guinea fresh forms of religious activity come into being from time to time definitely as a reaction against the encroachment of the white man. But the mainspring of others is at present obscure, and appears to be more distinctly related to purely native ideas. These cults afford a valid ground of argument against the very prevalent notion of the permanence of all native institutions and of the supposed disinclination of primitive peoples to adopt new ideas or new cults. In the five instances we are here concerned with, the movement has been stopped by the Government, so there are no means of telling how permanent they might have become. They illustrate, at all events, the methods by which cults have probably spread in the past, and, as I have previously suggested,[1] we have evidence elsewhere of a definite propaganda. Indeed, we might go further, and admit that savages may occasionally have a missionary zeal which impels them to impart to the benighted heathen the ceremonial or cult that yields to themselves so much satisfaction. The new observations of Mr Chinnery indicate nervous conditions which, so far as I am aware, have not been previously recorded of the natives of New Guinea, although they conform to what is well known in other parts of the world.

1. THE BAIGONA CULT.—The Baigona cult is of interest because "it illustrates the growth of a movement which is developing into a new religion before our eyes. The sorcery of Baigona seems to be of the kind generally known as white magic, like the Babalau of the Motu, but there is a danger that it may develop into systematic extortion."[2] A large snake, called Baigona, which lives on Keroro (Mount Victory), first became known by killing a man and making all the other people ill. Later it took a man named Maine to the top of Keroro, cut out his heart, dried it in the sun, and then placed it over the fire in its house, so that it would get well smoked. Remaining on the top of the mountain, Maine was initiated into the mysteries of Baigona, and given certain medicines that would cure all diseases. Thereupon he was allowed to return to his village, taking his heart with him, which he hung up under the verandah of his house. Amongst other instructions received by Maine from Baigona was one to the effect that he should proceed up the coast and in certain centres appoint other "Baigona men," all of whom were to be junior to himself. This he did, and there are "Baigonas" all along the

[1] *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, 1908, vi. pp. 44–46.

[2] Lieut.-Governor Murray, *Ann. Rep., Papua*, 1911–12, p. 14.